



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

News Release

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NEW BLOOD TEST MAY IMPROVE TB DIAGNOSIS
World Tuberculosis Day March 24, 2005

HONOLULU – Today, March 24, 2005, Hawaii, the U.S. and other nations around the world will celebrate *World Tuberculosis Day*. On this day in 1882, Robert Koch announced the discovery of the TB bacillus. The yearly commemoration is marked by events worldwide intended to raise awareness of TB and stress the importance of TB control efforts.

To commemorate World TB Day, the TB Program has several educational activities planned this week including a special presentation on updated screening methods with QuantiFERON^(R)-Gold for health providers on March 24, 2005 at the Queens Conference Center at 6-8pm (please call 832-3535 for more information).

A new diagnostic tool, QuantiFERON^(R)-Gold, was approved for use in the US by the Food and Drug Administration in December 2004. Hawaii's TB Control Program has moved forward and secured special state funding to implement this new blood test. This major shift in methodology should improve the specificity of TB testing and reduce the number of false positive tests -- thereby allowing the program to focus testing and treatment of latent TB infection on persons at highest risk for progression to active TB disease.

Hawaii leads the nation in having the highest state rate of tuberculosis (TB) with 9.2 cases per 100,000 (1.9 times the national rate). Although many people believe that TB is a disease of the past, it is still a leading killer among infectious diseases worldwide.

(more)

Last year, Hawaii State Department of Health (DOH) clinics placed and read 53,818 tuberculin skin tests statewide; among these, 19.2% were positive. Most of these persons had latent TB infection and were offered treatment with 9 months of antibiotics to prevent progression to active TB disease.

A more advanced form of tuberculosis is called "active TB". In 2004, there were 116 active TB cases reported to DOH in Hawaii, with Oahu reporting the highest number of TB cases in the State. In 2004, 78% of the state's TB cases were foreign-born, compared with 54% foreign-born TB cases reported nationally.

The DOH TB Program returned to Lanakila Health Center in summer 2003 after a total renovation of the 13,000 sq foot TB clinic with a negative air pressure system designed by NIOSH. Program enhancements include installation of a digital and network-integrated X-ray system and a renewed commitment to TB case management and prevention in Hawaii.

For more information on tuberculosis contact the Hawaii Tuberculosis Control Program at 832-5737 or visit the Department of Health Web site at www.hawaii.gov/health.

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